



# Best Practices for Conducting Faculty Searches

Harvard's faculty recruitment strategies are founded on the principle of **inclusive excellence**—maximizing excellence and diversity simultaneously. Embracing inclusive excellence is essential for keeping Harvard productive, creative, competitive, and successful in training the next generation of leaders in every field.

Each faculty search is a chance to attract the broadest talent pool. And to shape the future faculty. We can remain strong where we already are strong, and strike out in new intellectual directions as well.

We offer here the high points for practical strategies for productive and equitable searches:

- **Planning a search**
- **Recruiting a broad and deep group of candidates**
- **Evaluating candidates fairly**
- **Managing informative campus visits**

## Implicit Bias

An enormous body of literature confirms that we all have biases—some explicit, many implicit. Acknowledging and understanding your biases and those of your colleagues can minimize the influence they have on the search. We strongly encourage every search committee member to take at least one Implicit Association Test (IAT): [www.implicit.harvard.edu](http://www.implicit.harvard.edu).

## Planning a Search

---

- Develop a clear **position description**. Include essential qualifications and experience, but don't make it so specific that it risks deterring highly qualified applicants.
- Before the search committee is formed, the department—in collaboration with the Dean's Office—should sketch **an initial search plan** based on the approved position description. Include outreach activities:
  - lists of nominators
  - nominees
  - conferences and award lists where nominees may be found
  - online and print venues for advertising
- The **search committee** should include faculty from diverse backgrounds—not only women and minorities, but people in different subfields and career stages—to get the fullest range of ideas for recruiting and evaluating candidates. Consider including faculty from outside your department who may have expertise you need. A great search committee chair sets **ground rules** for confidentiality, deliberation and decision processes, record-keeping and decorum, watches for and restrains **imbalances of power**, in which some members are silenced, reminds all members that their contributions are necessary, and **ensures that diverse points of view are honored and new ideas are aired** throughout the deliberations.

## Recruiting a Broad and Deep Group of Candidates

---

- Make **the advertisement** welcoming to *all* candidates. Consider including a statement that emphasizes your Department's interest in diversifying its faculty. **Advertise** in publications that target women and minority scholars, particularly where there are placement goals for women and minorities.
- **Consult with colleagues** from diverse backgrounds, who are often well positioned to help you reach diverse candidates.
- **Consider candidates from other than the usual peer institutions**, particularly diverse candidates who may be publishing interesting work.
- **Personal, proactive outreach** is *the* single most effective tool for building and diversifying the pool. "Post and pray" does not work. All committee members should be engaged in **developing a broad and diverse pool**.

**Personal outreach is *the* single most effective tool for building and diversifying the pool.**

## Evaluating Candidates Fairly

---

- Before reviewing dossiers, develop **explicit evaluation criteria** and stick to them to ensure an equitable review.
- All committee members should **review all applications**. If there are hundreds, the chair should read them all and assign subsets to each committee member.

- Each applicant should receive an **in-depth review**—that includes reading the candidate’s work—from a few committee members. Vary the pairings of committee members with dossiers to avoid “mini-committees of two.”
- **Review and read the *complete dossier*.** Resist the temptation to sort by salient single features, like the prestige of the candidate’s institutions or awards.
- The chair should consider **reading the applications of women and minorities first** to ensure appropriate consideration in the process, particularly where there are placement goals for women and minorities.
- **Beware of subjective and biased selection criteria.** Women and minorities are often seen as exemplars of their demographic groups and evaluated more harshly in recommendation letters and student evaluations. “**Cultural fit**” can exclude candidates who challenge students and enhance the faculty, but aren’t like you. Your list of **all strong applicants** should be larger than just your favorites.
- The chair should monitor the composition of the “**long list**”: does it reflect the diversity of the applicant pool?
- Ask departmental colleagues to **review the long list** to see whether known strong candidates are missing. At this time reach out to potential candidates who may not have yet applied and ask if they would submit an application.
- A strong diverse **short list** is crucial because it is *this* set of people who will receive intense scrutiny. At the short list phase, the chair should **restate and emphasize the evaluation criteria**.
- Beware of what can look like **tokenism**: one woman, one minority member, and an otherwise all-white, all-male group. Interviewers evaluate women and minorities more fairly when more than one is interviewed.

The “long list” stage is an ideal time to reach out to potential candidates who may not have yet applied and ask if they would submit an application.

## Managing Informative Campus Visits

---

- Remember, **you are not only evaluating candidates, you are recruiting them.** Candidates are evaluating you and your department while you are evaluating them.
- Plan **the campus visit** carefully to ensure that all candidates have a similar, high quality visit.
- Develop an **information packet** to share with each candidate, with a detailed schedule identifying the name and affiliation of each person they will meet. Photographs, websites, and a map make it easier for candidates to orient themselves before arriving.
- Include a **common set of instructions** to help candidates prepare for their visit. Common instructions help level the playing field and improve the quality of interactions and talks.
- **Standardize the schedule** as much as possible while also providing opportunities customized for each candidate.
- Ask candidates about any **accommodations** they may require such as physical access needs or dietary restrictions. Also provide information on family-friendly policies and practices (e.g. parental leave, dual-career support, and childcare) and policies related to their appointment, review, and promotion.

**Candidates are evaluating you and your department as much as you are evaluating them.**

- Develop **interview guidelines** that will yield sufficient information for the committee to reach consensus and a persuasive recommendation.
- Develop a **common set of questions**. Ask the candidates the same questions in the same order.
- **Avoid panel-style interviews**: they encourage “group think” before the full evaluation process is complete.
- **Prepare interviewers to conduct interviews**. Provide the visit schedule, appointment materials, interview questions, the **Guide to Acceptable Interview Questions**, and the **candidate evaluation sheet** (the last two documents can be found at [www.faculty.harvard.edu/recruitment-best-practices](http://www.faculty.harvard.edu/recruitment-best-practices)).
- **Stick to professional—and not social—content** in your interview discussions. Questions that show that committee members have read a candidate’s work are essential.
- Describe to tenure-track candidates how they will be **mentored** and what **resources** they may have in the department and across Harvard.
- **All candidates should interact with faculty and students in multiple venues**, including talks, individual and group meetings, and meals. Consider a Q&A session with graduate students, “chalk talks,” and other less formal interactions. For candidates in technical fields, consider asking them to teach a sample class, so that the research talk isn’t the only means to evaluate teaching ability.
- All committee members should **attend all job talks**. Ideally, all voting members of the department should as well. Without consistent attendance, committee members and others may inadvertently give more weight to candidates whose talks they attended. **Don’t interrupt**. Let the candidates present their work fully and provide a strong closing.
- **Make sure that all job talks are well attended**. Enlist graduate students to attend and ask questions (and be sure to solicit their feedback).
- **Videotape job talks** and ensure that all voting members of the department who are unable to attend the talk watch the video.
- **Beware of placing excessive weight on the job talk**. It’s important, but it’s just one slice of an individual’s portfolio and not always the best source of data.
- **Avoid informal discussions** about candidates outside scheduled committee meetings, particularly in the car-ride after a dinner. This leads to **the temptation to agree too soon on the “likability” of a candidate**.
- Immediately after each campus visit, the chair should email everyone who interacted with the candidate asking for **feedback, preferably on a standardized form** such as the candidate evaluation sheet.
- **Committee members should ask hard questions now**: the same ones will surface during the department’s discussions of the committee’s report and recommendation.